CHAPTER III

LAND, LABOR, AND MONEY

A PEASANT'S life in spring and summer centered around the narrow strips of earth which surrounded the village. If the scene of labor was distant from the village, the tired workers who had been at their tasks since sunup often spent the night in the field rather than trudge the long way back home. In the middle of the morning, at noon, and again in midafternoon, the toilers stopped long enough for food, sometimes only bread and salt, and a little sleep. The burning noonday sun sifted through the leaves of the solitary tree beneath which the people sprawled. Fragile rays danced upon tired faces, old-fashioned costumes, a hand raised to brush away a fly, and oxen chewing lazily. Like animals the peasants worked, like animals they slept; but when harvest time brought an end to their toil they experienced the joyous satisfaction of work well done.

The average farm was about eighteen acres in size and was composed of sixteen separate and widely scattered strips. (See Table 10, Appendix I.) This land sold for a comparatively high figure because of its nearness to Sofia, but not because of any superior quality. In fact, most of the soil was sandy and gravelly, with a mixture of heavy clay.

In addition to a house in the village and his land, the peasant also owned a few animals and agricultural implements. The work animals numbered fewer than two for an eighteen-acre holding, and the plow was the only large implement found on every farm. More than any other joint operation, plowing had the flavor of an antique ritual. At dawn a slow procession moved from the village. The distant Balkan range loomed vaguely blue far across the Sofia plain, and the golden dome of Alexander Nevsky Cathedral in Sofia shone in the thin, clear light of morning. Behind the village, the slopes of

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the shoulder. In late July harvesters came from other villages to help at least one-third of the families (the others harvested their own grain) to cut the grain with sickles and place the stalks in little piles. An old man, expert through years of practice, then made up the sheaves by tying together a bundle of stalks with the longest stalks taken from a previous sheaf. He used a round, pointed stick about fourteen inches long to make the grain compact and to tie the knot ingeniously.

Most of the grain was threshed by the hoofs of animals, usually horses, on the packed, earthen threshing floors near the house. The Karakachani, a band of Wallachians from the village of Yakoruda in the Rhodope Mountains, brought about fifty horses to the village at threshingtime. A peasant paid the equivalent of a dollar a day for the service of a team. The grain was placed in the center of the floor, near a pole to which the animals were hitched. Around and around the pole the horses walked until the rope's length was used up, whereupon they reversed their direction. Much grain was threshed by the machine owned by some of the wealthier men of the village, which was beginning to supplant the old-fashioned threshing floors. Some of the families still winnowed the grain by tossing it in the face of a stiff breeze, but many others had access to a separating machine in the neighborhood.

But this *smes,* or wheat and rye mixture, was not the only crop raised. Quite a few of the homes had garden patches, either in the yard or on the edge of the village, where peppers, mealy potatoes, cabbages, and tomatoes were grown. The white beans from Dragalevtsy were said to be the best in this part of Bulgaria.

Some families grew sunflowers in order to sell the seeds for oil. Pumpkins from the cornfields were prized for use in a soggy pumpkin pie called *banitsa.* Fruit raising was decidedly underdeveloped, but the trees that were properly cared for produced very well. Straw for the animals was frequently borrowed or purchased from the wealthier peasants who had a surplus from the threshing.

The crop second in importance to *smes,* however, was corn. Of considerable interest were the groups of women who hoed the cornfield first in one direction, and a week later in a different direction. Varying in number from three to fifteen, these groups did

2: Sanders E-5 (no date) 1949 EE1 Bulgaria EE1

231
407

"Plowing had the flavor of an antique ritual." *See page 42.*

243

". . . harvesters . . . cut the grain with sickles, and placed the stalks in little piles." *See page 44.*

[Facing p. 48]

2:Sanders E-5 (no date) 1949 EE1 Bulgaria EE1

422
231

TABLE 9

DRAFT ANIMALS OWNED BY DRAGALEVTSY FARMERS, CENSUS, 1926

SIZE OF FARM IN DECARES	HORSES	OXEN	COWS*	WATER-BUFFALO	TOTAL
0- 10	7	0	0	0	7
10- 20	1	4	2	0	7
20- 30	8	10	5	5	28
30- 40	7	11	5	6	29
40- 50	8	16	5	0	29
50- 60	9	32	4	4	49
60- 70	7	27	3	5	42
70- 80	12	20	4	3	39
80- 90	3	6	0	4	13
90-100	5	11	0	0	16
100-150	41	60	6	14	121
150-200	14	16	0	11	41
200-300	5	0	0	6	11
Total	127	213	34	58	432

* Cows includes buffalo cows.

407
422

TABLE 10

FARM MACHINERY OWNED BY DRAGALEVTSY PEASANTS, CENSUS OF 1926
(EXCLUDING MONASTERY FARM)

TYPE OF IMPLEMENT OR MACHINE	NUMBER OWNED BY ALL 232 FARMERS
Wooden plow	176
Plows with wheels	157
Metal plows without wheels	5
Harrows	1
Rollers	13
Planters	2
Hay rake	1
Winnowing machines	57
Cream separator	1
Honey separator	1
Others	7